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> THE TRANSFORMERS #3

>INFILTRATION

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>>>>>

INFILTRATION:

Having acquired both a palm computer and, in the process, a death sentence from a roving Decepticon hit squad, teenage runaway VERITY CARLO and her companions, HUNTER O'NION and JIMMY PINK, have taken refuge within Ark-19, the Autobots' command vessel. There, RATCHET discovers unsettling photographic evidence on the computer that suggests the Decepticons' plans have advanced to a critical stage…

PHASE ONE CONTINUES...

>>>>>

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ARK-19:

YOU *SEE* THIS?!

RIGHT, YEAH, WELL....

...THOSE *PRETTY* PICTURES THE AMBULANCE GOT ALL WORKED UP OVER, UNLESS YOU LET US OUT OF HERE *RIGHT NOW*...

...*I'LL WIPE EVERY ONE OF THEM!*

THINK I'M BLUFFING, DO YOU? WELL, *WATCH ME!* I'LL DO IT... I *WILL!*

NOISY CREATURES, AREN'T THEY? STILL...

MUTE

...EASILY SORTED.

THEY'RE SOMEWHAT *CHAOTIC* BEINGS, I'LL GRANT YOU. BUT...

...RESOURCEFUL... AND INTREPID.

I STRONGLY SUGGEST WE DO *NOT* MAKE THE MISTAKE OF UNDERESTIMATING THEM. NOT WHEN YOU CONSIDER A LONE HUMAN, MUCH LIKE THESE THREE, I IMAGINE, DID WHAT WE COULD NOT...

...AND TRACKED THE *DECEPTICONS* TO THEIR STRATEGIC COMMAND BUNKER.

SO YOU SAY. NEVERTHELESS, *RATCHET*, YOU BROKE PROTOCOL– DIRECT CONTACT WITH A NATIVE SPECIES IS AN INFRACTION OF SUB-SECTION SIX-ALPHA OF–

WELL, YOU KNOW THE CODE VIOLATIONS. *INTIMATELY*.

RATCHET

IRONHIDE

SUNSTREAKER

PROWL

WHEELJACK

JAZZ

BUMBLEBEE

PROWL—FOR ONCE, *FORGET* THE RULEBOOK. I KNOW I WENT AGAINST YOUR *SPECIFIC* ORDERS, BUT, WELL, GIVEN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES...

...I'D DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN.

"AS IT WAS. I ARRIVED TOO LATE. THE LIFE-FUNCTIONS OF THE TARGET HAD ALREADY BEEN *TERMINATED.*

"CLEARLY, THE DECEPTICONS HAD *NOT* FOUND WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR, AS THEY'D LEFT AN OPERATIVE IN THE FIELD TO SEE *WHO,* IF ANYONE, CAME SNIFFING AROUND."

"I, AH, MANAGED TO DISCOURAGE, MY JOUSTING PARTNER, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, AT WHICH POINT I ENCOUNTERED THE HUMANS, *VERITYCARLO* AND *HUNTERONION.*"

"ONE OF WHOM..."

...HAD THE DATA STORAGE DEVICE. YES, I UNDERSTAND ALL THAT. WHAT I *DON'T* GET...

...IS WHY YOU SAW FIT TO INTERVENE IN THE *FIRST* PLACE AND RISK EXPOSING US *ALL!*

TELL ME SOMETHING, PROWL— WHY ARE WE HERE?

WHAT?

AND I MEAN THAT IN A LITERAL RATHER THAN EXISTENTIAL SENSE.

WHY ARE WE *HERE,* ON THIS PLANET?

WE'RE HERE TO *SAVE LIVES.*

NOW OKAY, MAYBE WE'RE TALKING MASS NUMBERS, A GLOBAL SCALE OF SPECIES SAVED, BUT ME, I TAKE IT *ONE LIFE AT A TIME.*

WHEN WE INTERCEPTED THAT DECEPTICON PULSEWAVE, I *KNEW* THAT MAN, WHOEVER HE WAS, COULD STILL BE SAVED.

ONLY YOU *DIDN'T* SAVE HIM.

IN FACT, WHAT YOU *DID* WAS PUT THREE *MORE* HUMANS IN THE FIRING LINE, ALL SO YOU COULD GIVE YOURSELF *ANOTHER* SHOT AT BEING A HERO!

I—

NO. IT WASN'T *LIKE* THAT. THEY WERE ALREADY *IN* THE FIRING LINE. I—

SAVE IT. THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE NOT IN THE BRIG RIGHT NOW IS BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU *CLAIM* IS ON THAT COMPUTER. YOU BROUGHT THE HUMANS INTO THIS. YOU WORK WITH THEM– GET THE DATA DOWNLOADED AND ANALYZED. THEN...

...GET *RID* OF THEM.

PROWL– *WAIT!*

YOU'RE GOING TO ALERT *PRIME*, RIGHT?

NO, RATCHET, I AM *NOT*. NOT UNTIL I'M SATISFIED THERE'S ANYTHING THAT *REMOTELY* WARRANTS HIS DIRECT INVOLVEMENT.

END OF DISCUSSION.

IRONHIDE–YOU MUST REALIZE I'M RIGHT! IF THE DECEPTICONS HAVE ENGAGED *SIEGE MODE*, WHATEVER'S HAPPENING IS HAPPENING *NOW!*

AND WHETHER THEY'VE GONE ROGUE OR ARE ACTING UNDER ORDERS, IT MEANS THE *SAME THING*...

...*MEGATRON!*

TUCSON, ARIZONA:

YEP, THAT'S HIM.

ODD FELLA. WANTED THAT OL' HEAP AWAY IN THE FAR CORNER, EVEN THOUGH I TOL' HIM WE HAD BETTER.

SAID H S NAME WAS *FINKLEROCK*, THO' I WOULDN'T PUT *TOO* MUCH STOCK IN THAT.

MIND IF I LOOK INSIDE?

BE MY GUEST. DON' RECKON FINKLEROCK'LL MIND NONE NEITHER. AH-HEH-HEH-

HEH?

VOP

HGKK!

FFOW!

NEXT?

ARK-19:

IS ANYONE THERE? HEL-LO?

THIS IS YOUR *LAST* CHANCE! I'M GOING TO PRESS *ERASE*... ANY MOMENT NOW...

VERITY...

...TIME *OUT!* I VOTE FOR PATIENCE, PEACE AND *QUIET!* JIMMY?

SECONDED. FULL MARKS FOR PERSISTENCE, BUT CHANCES ARE NO ONE'S LISTENING.

YEAH?

WELL, MAYBE I NEED TO SHOUT *LOUD-*

-AAAH!!

CAN'T HURT.

YOU! ONLY YOU'RE NOT A "YOU," ARE YOU? YOU'RE SOME KIND OF HOLOGRAM.

MORE OR LESS. IT'S HOLO*MATTER*, BUT THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE IS THE SAME.

NOW.

WHOA!

..WHAT SAY WE GET YOU *OUT* OF HERE?

A BIGGER BOX. NICE.

AN UNFORTUNATE NECESSITY. YOUR BEING HERE AT ALL..

...WAS CONDITIONAL ON SOMEWHAT *LIMITED* ACCESS.

AND WHERE IS HERE... *EXACTLY?*

THIS IS *ARK-19*—OUR, UH, SPACECRAFT.

BITCHIN'.

WE'RE IN *OUTER SPACE?!* BUT... WE *DROVE* HERE, DIDN'T WE? *ALL THE WAY!*

WE DID. AND YOU'RE NOT . IN OUTER SPACE. THAT IS

YOU'RE ON THE BOTTOM OF *LAKE MICHIGAN*, ABOUT TEN MILES NORTHEAST OF CHICAGO

OH.

NOW. THE COMPUTER

PLEASE.

THANK YOU.

IT WILL BE RETURNED TO YOU, I PROMISE, BUT I *MUST* HAVE ACCESS TO THE DATA STORED WITHIN. I BELIEVE THE VERY FUTURE OF THIS PLANET *DEPENDS* ON IT.

THIS WON'T TAKE LONG. I HAD *WHEELJACK* PREPARE AN INTERFACE AHEAD OF OUR ARRIVAL, BASED ON WEB SPECS FOR THE *SM-40*. I JUST HOPE...

WE REJOT
ALREADY
TOO LATE!

PULSEWAVE SENT.
ROUTER CONFIRMED
RESPONDENT .

SENT...
ROUTER CONFIRMED...
RESPONDENT... ...
OPTIMUS PRIME

SO... WHAT'S *SIEGE MODE?* AND...

...WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO *US,* TO PLANET EARTH?

THE DECEPTICONS ARE SPECIALISTS IN *INFILTRATION*- THEY DIG IN AND THEN SLOWLY DESTABILIZE THE GEOPOLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, FOMENTING GLOBAL *ANARCHY.*

SIEGE MODE IS A PROTECTIVE MILITARY CONFIGURATION, USUALLY ADOPTED DURING *PHASE FIVE.* I'VE ONLY SEEN IT ONCE BEFORE MYSELF AND-

...IN PROGRESS..

WELL, ANYWAY, IT'S *NOT* GOOD.

AND... IS THERE A PHASE *SIX?*

TRUST ME, YOU *DON'T* WANT TO KNOW

STRANGE THING IS, NOT ONLY IS IT FAR TOO EARLY FOR SIEGE MODE...

...THERE APPEAR TO BE *TWO* DISTINCT COMMAND BUNKERS-ONE IN ORGEON AND THIS ONE IN, AH, *NEBRASKA.*

MM. AND THERE'S MORE...

INTERIORS. SOMEHOW, HE GOT *INSIDE.*

LOOKS ABANDONED.

IT DOES, DOESN'T IT? CURIOUS FOR SURE...

BUT INCONCLUSIVE.

IF I'M TO CONVINCE PROWL AND THE OTHERS OF THE *IMMINENCY* OF THE THREAT . I NEED *MORE.*

JUST SO I'VE GOT THIS STRAIGHT...

NORMAL PROCEDURE IS FOR THESE DECEPTICONS TO ESTABLISH A SECURE HIDEY-HOLE AND DO WHATEVER THEY DO FROM THERE, RIGHT?

RIGHT

SO...

...WHY'D THEY *MOVE?*

RIVERSIDE, CA:

...AND WHILE DETAILS ARE SKETCHY, THE AUTHORITIES INSIST THIS IS AN ACCIDENT— RATHER THAN INCIDENT— INVESTIGATION...

KIDN

POLICE

POLICE

VOP

...THOUGH EXACTLY WHAT CAUSED THE DESTRUCTION OF AUTO SOLUTIONS AND THE SURROUNDING BUILDINGS REMAINS—

OREO

KIDN

HOLD IT, LINDY...

I... CAN'T GET A STEADY FRAME. IT'S LIKE-

HOLY—

THRAKRAK

KREABOOM

FOOM

KA-BOOM

NEXT?

DID YOU *GET* THAT?

TELL ME YOU *GOT* THAT!

ARK-19:

NO, NO... OUT OF THE QUESTION I CAN'T!

YOU CAN'T!

WHY NOT? YOU SAID YOURSELF— YOU NEED "MORE."

AND, LIKE, WHY THEY MOVED BASE COULD BE IT. THE ANSWER COULD BE RIGHT THERE, IN NEBRASKA!

AND WE CAN HELP YOU GET IT!

NO.

IT'S ONE THING TO HAVE PASSIVELY INVOLVED YOU, QUITE ANOTHER TO KNOWINGLY PLACE YOU IN WHAT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE EXTREME PERIL.

WHAT PERIL? YOU SAID YOURSELF... IT'S ABANDONED.

PLUS, OUR MYSTERY MAN GOT IN AND OUT SAFELY. WE KNOW THAT FOR A FACT!

AND... WE LAUGH IN THE FACE OF DANGER!

DID I REALLY SAY THAT?

NO. I'M SORRY. I APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'RE OFFERING TO DO FOR US-FOR *ME*- BUT NOTHING CAN JUSTIFY SUCH A RISK

TWO WORDS...

SIEGE MODE.

I-

-NEED A MOMENT.

HOO BOY. MY BATCH PROTO-INITIATOR *TOLD* ME THERE'D BE MOMENTS LIKE THIS...

NEED A *SECOND OPINION,* DOC?

BUMBLEBEE?

I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVERHEAR...

LARGELY BECAUSE I WAS LURKING BACK HERE, WHERE I HAD NO REAL GOOD REASON TO BE.

...AND, WELL, IF THERE'S ANOTHER OPTION, I *DON'T* SEE IT.

I-I *KNOW.* BUT...

...THIS GOES AGAINST *EVERYTHING* I STAND FOR. IF THEY WERE INJURED–*OR WORSE*–I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* I'D DO.

EXCEPT MAYBE LIVE TO *REGRET* IT FOR THE REST OF MY NATURAL LIFE.

I DON'T CLAIM TO BE THE *GREATEST* AUTHORITY ON TOUGH DECISIONS, DOC, BUT I KNOW THIS MUCH...

...A WRONG CALL HERE AND THE WHOLE OF MANKIND MAY *NOT* LIVE TO REGRET IT!

HH.

I GUESS... WE'RE GOING TO NEBRASKA.

AND IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, DOC...

...I'M COMIN' *WITH* YOU!

BUT–

BACK-UP, OOC, *BACK-UP*. CAN YOU HONESTLY SAY YOU WON'T NEED IT?

NO.

VERITY, HUNTER, JIMMY– LET'S *ROLL!*

YES! *RESULT!*

OOO...

...A *BUG?*

COO-*OOOL!*

PHOENIX, AZ:

WELL, HECK... GONNA TAKE MORE'N SOAP 'N' SUDS TO GET THIS ONE ROADWORTHY.

SHOULD BE IN THE GARAGE, NOT MY LOT!

DAMN CLERICAL FOUL-UPS.

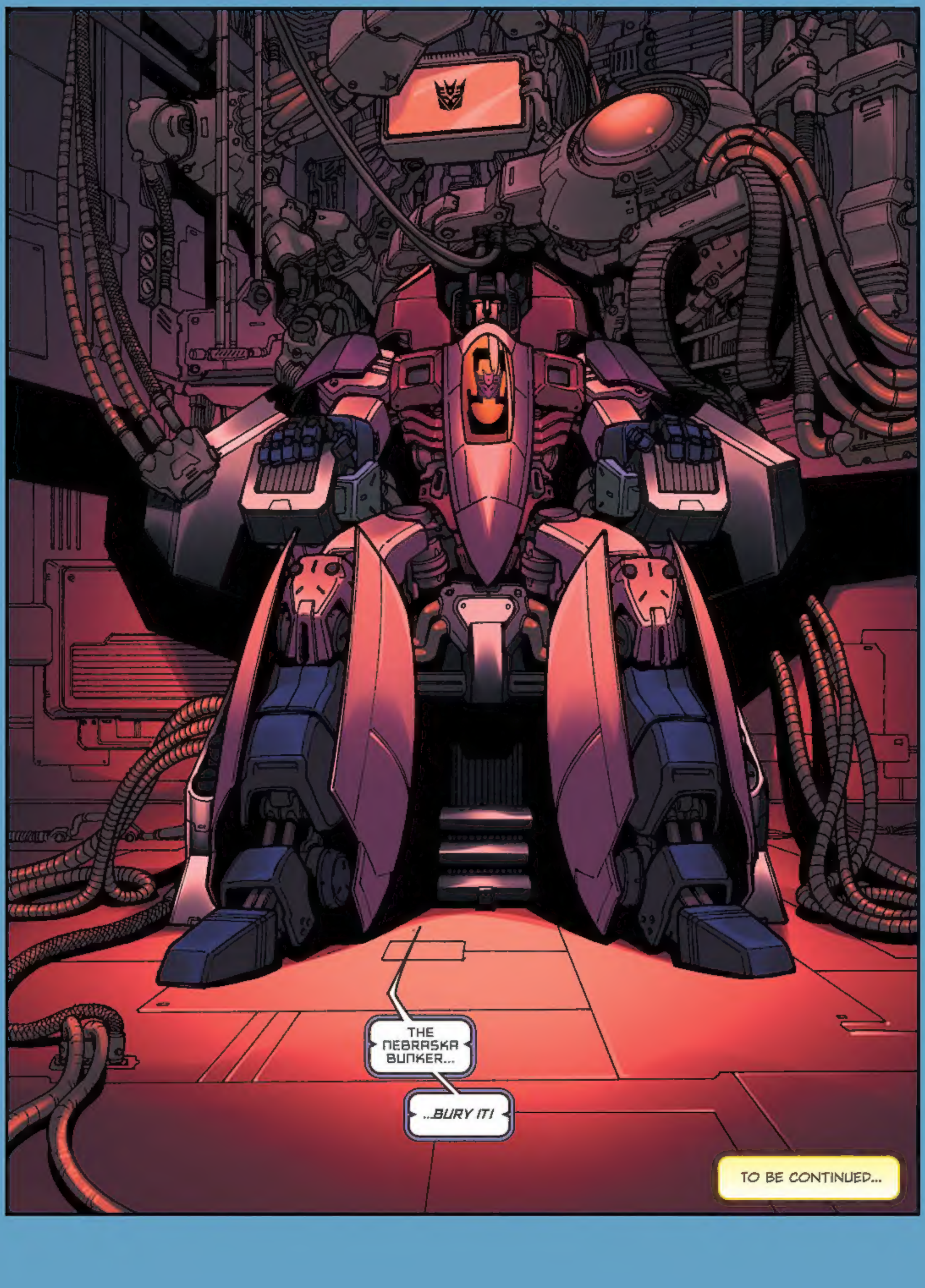
VOP

DELORES? YEAH, THIS ROLLING STOCK IN BAY NINETEEN, IT'S-

KABOOM

NEVER MIND.

NEXT?


THE NEBRASKA BUNKER...
...BURY IT!
TO BE CONTINUED...